

# Meeting Public Comments

**Subcommittee meeting and times are as follows:****HSB 623**

A bill for an act relating to early childhood and family services, including the creation of an early childhood and family services system, state child care assistance for the child care workforce, making appropriations, and including effective date provisions.

**Subcommittee members:** Wilz, H.-CH, Bergan, Ehlert

**Date:** Wednesday, February 4, 2026

**Time:** 12:30 PM - 1:00 PM

**Location:** RM 305

Names and comments are public records. Remaining information is considered a confidential record.

**Comments Submitted:****02-03-2026**

Brenda Jenkins [Retired]

I am opposed to HSB 623. ECI best serves communities when there is local governance provided by people who know the needs of families in those communities and the services available. Most members on ECI boards are representatives from early childhood agencies serving young children and their families. Why would we give up local control? This doesn't fit the local control narrative. Let's keep the future of our children a priority. Please vote "no."

**02-03-2026**

Peggy Hardy [Early Childhood Educator]

HSB 623 is alarming for all early childhood programs. Concerningly, HSB 623 would expand ECIs DISTINCT focus on birth to five to a broader focus on children under 19 "with an emphasis on children under six years of age. Birth to five is already an underfunded, overlooked need. All the research shows us the importance of the first few years of life and brain development. Small rural areas stand to lose access to funding they've been utilizing for this underserved age range. The bill would provide loss of local control established boards who tailor services to local need, risk reduced funding for prevention and early intervention programs, and increase bureaucracy and lesson responsiveness to community needs. HHS is already a huge entity. It is unlikely that efficiency and effectiveness would increase with greater bureaucracy. Many vulnerable families with young children are leery of HHS as an organization, which is a barrier to them receiving much needed services.

**02-03-2026**

Natalie Hall

Oppose HSB 623. Every time the system is changed, providers have to adjust, and families miss out on services. The current organizations such as ECI do a fantastic job. Continue funding them, increase the funding even, and improve upon the current system.

**01-29-2026**

Rebekah Jacobs

Please vote Opposed to HSB 623

**02-04-2026**

Jared Lawrence [Current local board member of ECI out of Monroe/Appanoose/Lucas/Davis Counties] Please vote NO to HS 623. ECI is well ran and has been since it's inception in 1998(under the Empowerment name). There has never been question of fraud, audit issues, or not using credentialed programs, as HHS has led you to believe in this legislation. What we do know is ECI has provided the services in the communities they serve based on what those communities NEED. ECI local boards have oversight by the State ECI board. This legislation gets rid of that board, that is bipartisan and reflects all areas of Iowa. These new boards that oversee districts will not include each county and will be hand picked by HHS themselves. No oversight will be done and HHS will fully control what services and what communities get those services. This legislation also changes ages served to under 19, with no reason as to why. We need MORE funding for early childhood, not less!!! VOTE NO Please

**02-01-2026**

Stacy Volmer

House Study Bill 623 should be rejected. Though framed as reform, this bill dismantles Iowas communitybased early childhood system and replaces it with centralized control under the Department of Health and Human Services, weakening local authority and accountability. By repealing Early Childhood Iowa and eliminating decategorization, the bill erases decades of local expertise and collaboration. It substitutes appointed advisory councils with no real decisionmaking power, stripping communities of meaningful input into services designed for their own families. The bill also grants HHS sweeping authority during a disruptive transition, including emergency rulemaking and the ability to alter district boundaries without judicial review. Combined with broad data collection and weak safeguards, this raises serious concerns about transparency, privacy, and public trust. Iowa should strengthen what works, not dismantle it.

**02-02-2026**

Dan Hiserote

If this bill provides more DIRECT funding to parents/Center to expand current childcare programs or broaden poverty thresholds, then it needs to be passed. It seems a lot of budget dollars are spent at upper and middle support levels that don't reach the parents/children. The section providing free childcare for childcare worker families is a MUST. This incentive is the one benefit keeping Centers alive and viable in this job market.

**02-02-2026**

Sara Cross

I oppose Iowa House File 623 and the elimination of Early Childhood Iowa (ECI). For decades, ECI has ensured that early childhood decisions are guided by local expertise and community voice. Eliminating ECI would dismantle a proven, communitybased system and weaken coordination for children and families who rely on early intervention services. This proposal does not streamline services. In fact, it weakens them. Centralizing ECI funding and administration within HHS, across seven behavioral health regions, removes local accountability and risks disconnecting services from the communities they are meant to serve. Early intervention prevents more costly and complex outcomes later, and destabilizing these systems will ultimately harm Iowas most vulnerable children and families. I urge legislators to oppose HF 623 and protect Iowas locally driven early childhood infrastructure.

**02-03-2026**

Kevin Grieme

I am voicing my concerns over this proposed legislation. ECI has had a longstanding tradition of working with local partners to identify local solutions to local challenges. Moving this to a statewide system, will leave a void at the local level. Addressing needs through a statewide developed strategy can result in a cookie cutter approach, that will not fully meet the needs at the local level as the many partners currently work to provide. When you can develop solutions at the level closest to the problem, you can achieve better results.

**02-03-2026**

Rebecca Ausman [A Leap Ahead In-Home Care]

I oppose Iowa House File 623 and the elimination of Early Childhood Iowa (ECI). Our child care programs and young families need more support at the local level. Valuable programs that provide free hearing and vision screening for children under 5 and support provider education and child mental health services have been cut, leaving programs unsupported when challenging child behaviors occur. We need to support our early education programs and providers to prevent provider burnout and chronic expulsion and suspensions in preschool programs. Investment in highquality early education programs through program supports, like ECI lead to increased success stories as our children enter school. Please invest in local early childhood support programs.

**02-03-2026**

Kristi Waller

Oppose this bill!!! It weakens early childhood services!!!!

**02-03-2026**

Barb Coenen [Parents as Teachers]

Please vote no to HSB623. I believe this will be detrimental to the early childhood programs, especially in rural areas where we now have local boards who see the needs of the families in our areas.

**02-03-2026**

Julie Hanlin [Linn County ECI board member ]

Please see attached

[Attachment](#)

**02-03-2026**

Kristie Nixon [Early Childhood Family Support]

Iowas children & families deserve policies that build on proven success, protect local voices & prioritize the critical early years, birth to age five. For these reasons, I urge you to reject House Study Bill 623. While framed as reform, HSB 623 dissolves Iowas early childhood system by replacing a successful, communitybased model with centralized control under the Department of HHS. This shift weakens local authority, accountability, & responsiveness. ECI has spent decades building strong local partnerships tailored to community needs. HSB 623 removes decisionmaking power from local boards & replaces them with advisory councils lacking real authority. It also expands focus beyond birth to age five, stretching already limited resources and undermining prevention and early intervention effortsparticularly harming rural and underserved communities. Support for free child care for childcare workers is addressed in HSB 500 & shouldn't be tied to legislation that dismantle ECI.

**02-03-2026**

Val Cameron [EC Educator]

Please oppose HSB 623. This bill would significantly reduce local decisionmaking and disrupt essential early childhood services. The first two thousand days of life are critical for a child's longterm development, and communities need the flexibility to respond to the unique needs of their children and families. Local, citizenled boards are best positioned to build effective partnerships and systems of support. Centralizing these decisions would weaken services that are already working well. I urge you to vote NO on HSB 623 to keep children and families first.

**02-04-2026**

Rachel Bardwell [SYP Parents As Teachers ]

I urge you to OPPOSE HSB623 because it threatens Iowa's established, communityled early childhood framework. This bill would dismantle the current Early Childhood Iowa system, which is already established and effective in every Iowa county. Local control would be replaced by state bureaucracy, making state government larger. This would make service provision to families and children much more cumbersome at the local level. This shift weakens local accountability and dilutes resources for critical birthtofive prevention efforts, especially in rural areas. Please vote NO for the children and families across Iowa.

**02-03-2026**

Brooke Olson [Early Childhood Family Support]

My name is Brooke, and I am writing in opposition to HSB 623. For decades, our community in Black Hawk County has built and maintained a highly successful coalition of Early Childhood Family Support & Home Visitation programs. Our current structure has allowed our community's youngest & most vulnerable families to successfully receive support through these systems, while also providing resource navigation & evidencebased parenting education. Because our community has such an incredible history with collaborating successfully, we have built and maintained a rich and successful partnership network built to serve families and help them meet their goals/needs.

**02-03-2026**

Paige Chickering [Save the Children Action Network]

In this current form, we cannot support this bill. Although we are hugely supportive of Division 7, which would codify the CCA pilot program for providers (allowing the children of people working in child care to qualify for CCA) we are very concerned about the elimination of ECI proposed in this legislation. We continue to believe that local area boards provide needed local context and expertise in the execution of ECI programs, which are invaluable to supporting young children across Iowa. We want to ensure HHS is able to draw down additional federal funding and hope that amendments to this legislation can be made to preserve ECI while making the necessary changes to support HHS in being able to draw down federal funding. Thank you for your consideration, Paige Chickering Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)

**02-03-2026**

Peter Brantner [Mental Health Counselor ]

I'm opposed to HSB 623 and urge you to vote against it.

**02-03-2026**

Barbara Parrish [Retired Preschool Teacher]

I oppose this current proposed bill that will take the control away from the local rural communities who know best what is needed. The early learning years(05years) are so vital and shouldnt suffer the loss of funding or local control.

**02-03-2026**

Shelley Conover

House Study Bill 623 proposes changes that would dismantle Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) as a locally driven system, replacing it with a centralized, onesizefitsall approach. For years, ECI partnerships have allowed communities to identify and respond to their unique needs, building coordinated services that reflect local priorities and resources. Shifting to a uniform statewide model risks weakening community voice, reducing flexibility, and undermining programs that have been tailored to support families and young children effectively at the local level. Policies impacting early childhood services should strengthen local collaboration rather than replace it with a cookiecutter system that may not serve every community equally well.

**02-03-2026**

Sandy Maxa

I am opposed to HSB 623 and I urge you to vote against it.

**02-03-2026**

Elizabeth Schmitz

I oppose HSB 623 and the elimination of Early Childhood Iowa (ECI). The bill raises serious concerns about funding clarity, service continuity, and the loss of a proven accountability structure. HSB 623 dismantles the current model in which local ECI boards hold grants from HHS and subgrant funds to community providers, without explaining how nearly 450 providers statewide would be funded. ECI already has strong, documented accountability: local boards submit annual budgets for HHS approval, upload monthly financial reports, report program and outcome data, and undergo annual independent audits. ECI braids state, federal, local, and private dollars to maximize impact and reduce reliance on state funds. Centralizing funds under HHS would reduce flexibility, weaken local partnerships, and slow responses to community needs. Iowa should strengthen systems that work not replace them with a centralized model that increases uncertainty for families and providers.

**02-03-2026**

Heidi Hudson

I work in early childhood education and see firsthand how important Early Childhood Iowa is for supporting young children and families in my community. HSB 623 raises serious concerns for me because it removes local decisionmaking and replaces it with a centralized system where advisory councils have no real authority. Early childhood services are preventative by nature, and when funding is uncertain, prevention is often the first area cut. Expanding the system's focus to children under 19 increases the risk that birthtofive programs will lose funding and priority. Once Early Childhood Iowa is eliminated, there is no clear way to protect these services if the state cannot afford the new structure. I strongly encourage lawmakers to protect Early Childhood Iowa and maintain a system that values local expertise and early intervention.

**02-03-2026**

Dayna "JOY" Brown [Early Childhood Educator]

I'm 100% opposed to HSB623 and I'd like to urge you to vote against this bill.

**02-03-2026**

Kim Brantner [Retired Supervisor PAT]

I am opposed to this bill. Early Childhood Iowa was established for local control by the State of Iowa for single or multiple counties to use with families with children prenatal through 5 years of age. The

importance of rural countries was emphasized. More and more dollars are being pulled from education including early childhood and rural Iowa. Help make education a priority for children and families.

**02-03-2026**

Sally Hartley [Retired]

ECI (formerly known as Community Empoerment) was legislated and implemented over 25 years ago to meet the needs of young children, their families, early childhood educators, and community provider and support agencies. It has been successful as through local control and engagement each area was able to Codys on those local needs and thus have greater impact. Local control allowed for upclose and inperson participation. This allowed the local staff to gather data and thus create programming needed and these individuals were invested in the success of those programs as everyone knew each other and worked together. To move to a central management system would mostly focus on theMoney not what each area and/or community needs. Having served on the state board early in the development of ECI, the intent was to build a system that focused on local control in order to have the best impact. Why throw away over 25 years of successful hard work?

**02-04-2026**

Chris Wirtz

Please vote no to HSB 623. Years ago we shifted to local control for our early childhood funding to let areas have input on funding programs that worked in each area. This would reverse the local control and take funding away from our youngest Iowans and their families.

**02-04-2026**

Tim Maxa

Say no to HSB 623. Local control is so important and we have good people at work already.

**02-04-2026**

Nina Utterback [Parents as Teachers]

Vote no on HSB 623. It is so important that communities and families have local control of their programs and service with years of community connections and built trust with local ECI boards giving families and their children support to meet specific needs and support the local community. These relationships have been key to providing the best services for communities and the families we serve.

**02-04-2026**

Nina Utterback [Parents as Teachers]

Vote no on HSB 623. It is so important that communities and families have local control of their programs and service with years of community connections and built trust with local ECI boards giving families and their children support to meet specific needs and support the local community. These relationships have been key to providing the best services for communities and the families we serve.

**02-04-2026**

Allison Putney [Indianola Preschool]

I oppose HSB 623. This will take away local ECI boards and thus funding for local preschools. We know that centralizing funding will not make it more efficient, but will increase the red tape that it takes to get funding. We have over 10% of our student population using scholarships from our local ECI funds, and the number increases every year. These funds make it possible for families to access early childhood education for their children at age 3, which is not provided through universal preK at the school district. Additionally, these scholarships allow families to choose which preschool is right for their families.

Families would not be able to afford our tuition, even as a nonprofit, without the scholarship, and would be forced to send their children to the school district's prek program, which consistently sends students to Kindergarten unprepared. Approving this bill takes away local funding and thus takes away access and school choice for our youngest learners.

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